

Alameda County
Congestion Management Agency



Program Evaluation Executive Summary

MAY 2005

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (CMA) Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) Program has been in operation since April 9, 1998. This report presents the results of the seventh annual program evaluation and covers program operations during 2004 including comparison with previous years. The evaluation provides information about:

1. The effectiveness of the program's administration;
2. Statistics on employer and employee participation and trips taken;
3. The program's success in causing an increase in the use of alternative modes; and
4. Recommendations about any area(s) that need modification or expansion.

This executive summary includes a program description, overview of historical trends, summary of major findings of the evaluation, and program recommendations.

Program Description

The Alameda County CMA Guaranteed Ride Home Program is sponsored by the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (CMA) and is funded with Transportation Funds for Clean Air (TFCA) from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

The GRH Program provides a "guaranteed ride home" to any registered employee working for a participating employer in cases of emergency on days the employee has used an alternative mode of transportation to get to work. Alternative modes include: carpools, vanpools, bus, train, ferry, walking and bicycling. Participating employers must have at least 100 employees at worksites located in Alameda County. As of December 31, 2004, 120 employers and 3,268 employees were registered with the program.

The objective of the program is to maximize modal shift from driving alone to commute alternatives including transit, carpools, vanpools, bicycling and walking. Based on this stated objective, the program can be considered a success. Each year of operation, the program has seen an increase in the number of participants who use alternative modes and an increase in the frequency with which they use alternative modes.

Historical Trends

The Guaranteed Ride Home Program began as a demonstration program in 1998. Over the course of the last seven years, GRH has grown into a smoothly operating program with 120 registered employers, nearly 3,300 registered employees, and about 145 trips provided each year.

Seventy-two (72) employers registered with the program during the initial six-month demonstration period. Another 28 registered during the 1999 operating year, and 19 registered during the 2000 operating year. In 2001 and 2002, 13 and 12 new employers joined the program, respectively. In 2003, fourteen employers registered. Sixteen (16) new employers registered in 2004. The program now has a total of 120 participating employers.

During the initial six-month demonstration period, about 880 employees joined the Guaranteed Ride Home Program. Another 794 joined during the 1999 operating year, and 591 in the 2000 operating year. In 2001 and 2002, 494 and 525 new employees joined, respectively. In 2003, the number of new employees registered was 710. In 2004, 543 new employees registered, down from 2003, but a slight increase over 2001 and 2002. The program now has nearly 3,300 registered employees.

A total of 966 trips have been provided from the time of the Program's inception through the end of 2004. During the 2004 operating year, 141 trips were taken, consistent with recent years (148 in 2001, 144 in 2002 and 149 in 2003). Most registered employees (89%) never take a trip. Of those who have taken trips, the vast majority (79%) have taken only one or two trips. This demonstrates the "insurance" nature of the program.

Based on the fact that each registered participant may take up to six trips in a one-year period, the rate that guaranteed rides are taken is very low. For example, at the end of 2004, there were a total of 19,608 potential rides based on a total enrollment of 3,268 employees. However, only 141 trips were actually needed that year (less than 1% of potential trips).

Figure ES-1 illustrates some key historical trends for the Guaranteed Ride Home Program.

Figure ES-1 Guaranteed Ride Home Program Historical Trends

Trend	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Program Participants²							
Total Number of Employers	72	100	119	132	127	110	120
New Employers Registered	72	28	19	13	12	14	16
Total Number of Employees	880	1,674	2,265	2,759	2,664	2,785	3,268
New Employees Registered	880	794	591	494	525	710	543
Trip Statistics							
Total Number of Trips Taken(Taxi and Rental Car Trips)	57	156	168	148	144	149	141
Total Number or Rental Car Trips					8	10	18
Average Trips per Month	6.3	13	14	12.3	12	12.4	11.8
Average Trip Distance (miles)	28.7	36.2	37.8	42.5	42.9	45.2	46.2
Average Taxi Trip Cost	\$54.51	\$64.29	\$69.73	\$86.37	\$88.07	\$94.19	\$85.40
Survey Results							
Number of Surveys Collected	215	350	270	346	517	619	658
Survey Response Rate	N/A	21%	12%	12%	19%	22%	20%
Percent Who Would Not Use an Alternative Mode Without GRH	15%	16%	19%	19%	34%	41%	47%
Increase in the Percent of Those Using Alternative Modes Four or More Times a Week	N/A	10%	15%	8%	15%	17%	14%
Number of Single Occupancy Vehicle Trips Reduced per week by GRH	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,768	3,946	3,774

1 The Program began in April 1998

2 The number of new employees and employers registered is actually higher than shown in the table.

Some employers and employees have been deleted from the database due to job changes and employers going out of business. The numbers shown in the table are based on those currently registered in the database.

Major Findings of the Evaluation

The program evaluation consisted of an examination of the program's administrative functions, statistics on employer and employee participation and use, data from the surveys of participating employees, and recommendations for program changes and enhancements. The following sections present the major findings from the evaluation.

Program Administration

Program Operating Principles

- To be eligible for the program, employers must have 100 or more employees. While some large employers throughout the county have not yet been contacted, it may be appropriate to review and evaluate this eligibility requirement in the coming year since there are several employers with less than 100 employees who have expressed an interest in participating in the program. The process of enrolling and getting an emergency ride home continues to work smoothly.
- The use limitation of six trips per year continues to be appropriate. Very few program participants reach the limit. No one in 2004 reached the limit of six trips.
- The rental car demonstration program was successfully implemented in October 2002 in the Tri-Valley area (Dublin, Livermore and Pleasanton), and county wide in April 2004. The program realized an estimated savings of \$2,246 on ride costs in 2004, and participants who used rental cars were pleased with the flexibility and convenience of this new option.

Marketing and Promotions

- Approximately one-tenth of program resources are dedicated to marketing and promotion. This time is spent marketing both to employers and their employees in the form of making calls, distributing flyers, and giving presentations and events. The program has sought to leverage these resources by relying on participating employers to promote the GRH Program internally, and by seeking co-marketing opportunities with local transit agencies and with organizations that promote commute alternatives. In 2004, the program focused on increasing exposure of GRH by attending more events such as Oakland CarFree Day and the Hacienda Business Park Commuter Fair.
- The availability of the marketing materials in electronic format continues to be a useful and inexpensive tool for promoting the program.

Employer and Employee Participation

Employer and Employee Registrations

- Both the number of new employers and new employees increased in 2004. As of December 31, 2004, 120 employers and 3,268 employees were registered.
- North and east Alameda County continue to be the areas with the most employers enrolled in the program. A large percentage of registered employers are located in Pleasanton, partly because of the concentration of employers in the Hacienda Business Park (where all employers are eligible regardless of size because of their location in the business park which includes over 400 employers).

Trips Taken

- Through 2004, a total of 966 trips (930 taxi trips and 36 rental car trips) have been taken. 141 trips were taken during the 2004 calendar year for an average of 11.8 trips per month. The number of trips taken in 2004 was consistent with recent years.
- Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the employees enrolled have never taken a trip. Of the 469 employees who have taken a trip since program inception (1998), 79% have taken only one or two rides.
- Unscheduled overtime was the most common reason for taking a trip in 2004 (23% of trips), followed by personal illness (18%).
- Those who carpool or vanpool are more likely to use a guaranteed ride home trip than those who use other alternative commute modes. Sixty-three percent (63%) of guaranteed rides home were used by car- and vanpoolers.
- The average trip distance has increased every year of the program. The average trip distance for all trips in 2004 was 46.2 miles. The average trip distance for rental car trips only was 107.9 miles. This indicates an even greater cost saving from the rental car program because the cost to rent a car is fixed while taxi rides cost more for longer trips.
- The average taxi trip cost decreased in 2004 for the first time since the inception of the program. This is probably due to the increased use of the rental car program for longer trips. The average taxi trip cost in 2004 was \$85.40.
- The cost of a rental car trip is \$55.00. It is estimated that the use of rental cars in 2004 saved \$2,246 in trip costs.

Employee Commute Patterns

- The most common trip-origin cities are Pleasanton and Oakland. The most common trip-destination cities are Oakland, Manteca and Tracy.
- The most common trip destination county is Alameda County, followed by San Joaquin, Contra Costa and Solano Counties.

Employee Survey

The 2004 survey was distributed and completed primarily online. We attempted to contact all employer representatives (some were non-responsive despite repeated attempts) to request their assistance with the distribution of the survey. When employers were not available or by special request, we contacted employees with the survey directly. Of the 3,268 employees currently enrolled in the program, 658 surveys were completed, resulting in a 20% response rate. Of them, 95% of the surveys were completed online. The respondents represent 44 different participating employers. Both employer and employee participation has increased this year probably due to the ease of completing the survey electronically.

Use of Alternative Modes

The Guaranteed Ride Home Program continues to be successful in encouraging the use of alternative modes. According to 2004 survey responses:

- When asked how important GRH was in their decision to stop driving alone, 68% of respondents who used to drive alone said that it was at least somewhat important. Most, 65%, of all respondents reported that the GRH program encourages them to use alternative modes more days than they would otherwise. If the GRH Program were not available, the majority (53%) reported that they would continue to use an alternative mode.
- The survey asked respondents how they traveled to work at present and before they registered for the GRH program. Both before and after the program, the most common modes were BART, driving alone, and carpooling. Twenty seven percent (27%) reported that they had reduced the number of days they drove alone to work by an average of 3.3 days per week per registrant.
- Using these survey findings, we are able to extrapolate the impact of the program on travel behavior of all participants. The program reduces 3,774 single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips per week. This is equivalent to 196,248 drive-alone one way trips per year.¹

Other Commute Characteristics

- Commute distances are generally 50 miles or less (88%). Half (52%) are between 11 and 35 miles.
- Most (70% each) program participants travel to work during peak commutes hours of 7-9 AM.
- About half (51%) of respondents drive alone to access their primary commute mode of transit or ridesharing.

¹ This is based on program enrollment as of December 2004.

Customer Service Ratings

The survey includes two questions to evaluate participant's level of satisfaction with the customer service provided in the program. Additional information on service satisfaction is collected in the survey participants return after they have taken a ride.

- The administrative functions of the GRH Program continue to receive very high ratings for the quality of customer service, consistent with previous years' evaluations.
- Passengers were very positive in their evaluation of the transportation services provided through GRH. However, wait time for a taxi was slightly longer than stipulated in the contract (77% waiting 15 minutes or less – it should be 80% – and 5% waiting longer than 30 minutes – it should be none).

Employer Survey

The 2004 program evaluation includes the first survey of employer representatives. The survey was distributed and completed by mail. We tried to differentiate the employer survey from the employee survey to lessen the confusion for the employer contacts. Of the 120 employers currently enrolled in the program, 44 surveys were completed, resulting in a 37% response rate.

Use of Alternative Modes

Employer contacts were asked whether the program made a difference in employee's commute patterns and if their company would participate if an annual fee were charged.

- When asked how important GRH was in encouraging employees to use alternative modes, 79% of employers stated that participation in the program increases alternative mode usage at their worksite.
- The survey asked respondents if their company offered additional commuter benefits to employees. More than two-thirds (70%) reported that they do provide other transportation subsidy programs. The results show that most participating companies are actively promoting alternative modes.
- Based on survey findings, just over half of respondents stated that they would not participate in the program if an annual fee were charged. About one-third (30%) of employer representatives reported that they were not sure and that they would have to discuss with management.

Program Management

- The survey asked respondents how long they have managed the program for their company. Nearly 75% have been with GRH for one or more years. When asked about the workload that GRH presents, employers overwhelmingly (98%) reported that their workload was manageable or they have time to do more.
- The survey results showed that employer contacts may need better information and instructions for using instant enrollment vouchers. About one-quarter (27%) of the respondents reported that they did not understand the instant enrollment process. In addition, 77% stated that they have never issued an instant enrollment voucher.

Customer Service Ratings

The survey includes two questions to evaluate the employer representatives' level of satisfaction with the customer service provided in the program.

- "Clarity of information" provided by program staff received very high ratings. When asked about the hotline assistance they received, 56% of the respondents stated that they received "good" or "excellent" service and 44% reported that they "did not know".

Recommendations

Ongoing Program Operations

1. Continue to implement a comprehensive marketing approach.

In 2005, marketing efforts will focus on 1) co-marketing with other programs promoting commute alternatives, such as RIDES and 511.org; 2) direct marketing to employers (through RIDES or directly to employers from a list); 3) maximizing program exposure via the internet and other media; and 4) maintenance marketing and outreach activities directed to inactive (or minimally active) employers throughout Alameda County. Following is a further explanation of some of these efforts:

- **Continue co-marketing efforts with other organizations that promote commute alternatives.**

The GRH Program will continue to focus on building partnerships with other organizations that promote commute alternatives, including RIDES, local transit agencies, vanpool providers and commute benefit providers (such as Commuter Check).

- **Contact inactive, or minimally active, employers who are already enrolled.**

We will also continue to contact employers with very few or no registered employees in order to increase employee enrollment among those employees who are already eligible for the program. These outreach efforts will also help staff identify those employers who are no longer interested in participating in the GRH program.

- **Continue administering an annual Employer Survey.**

The 2004 survey provided beneficial data about the program from the company's perspective. An annual survey of employers will be a helpful tool in gaining information regarding marketing and customer service.

- **Continue to attend and participate in commuter fairs and related events.**

We will continue to work with regional organizations and Alameda County employers to stay abreast of the various commuter oriented events in the area. These efforts have proven to be one of the most effective methods of registering new employees and employers. It is important to become involved as we not only attract new participants, but as was the case with Oakland CarFree Day, we can receive free media coverage.

2. Evaluate the impact of expanding the rental car program countywide.

The evaluation of the rental car program is displayed in Chapter 3. We will conduct a similar evaluation of the countywide program in the 2005 program evaluation report. We will also monitor rental car usage for non-emergency trips and make recommendations to increase its usage to reduce taxi costs.

2005 Recommendations

1. Consider purchasing a database listing of eligible employers

In an effort to increase employer enrollment, the program should purchase a business listing of all employers with 100+ workers in Alameda County, provided the list is within the budget of the program.

2. Require that all non-emergency trips of 50 miles or more (during Enterprise's business hours) use the rental car service.

In an effort to reduce taxi costs, the program should consider implementing a mileage restriction for non-emergency trips. The program currently encourages all participants to use the rental car service for trips over 20 miles, but there is no method of enforcement. In addition to requiring 50+ mile trips to use the rental car service, the program will also encourage participants working non-traditional shifts to plan ahead to reserve a car during Enterprise's operating hours.

3. Consider developing guidelines and consolidating program for business districts.

Employer organizations outside of business parks have requested special status to allow businesses with less than 100 employees to register for GRH. We will consider developing new guidelines to allow these organizations access to GRH providing that it is within the program budget.

4. Consider having a new poster and marketing materials to promote the program.

Employers occasionally request the new marketing materials to promote GRH to their employees. A new poster with pull-off attached brochures might be one way of increasing employee participation at currently registered companies. The program should evaluate the cost effectiveness of designing and printing new posters and materials to recruit employee registrants.

5. Create and distribute new materials that help employer representatives with the instant enrollment process.

Results from the employer survey showed some inexperience with the instant enrollment process. A new informational flyer or memo will be distributed to employers explaining the step by step process of instant enrollments.